

Shiver Me Timbers!



Nestled in the centre of New Zealand's North Island is one of the countries first Nga Haerenga trails running from Pureora in the north to Ongarue in the south. The first 35kms of this trail takes riders up the lower slopes of Mt Pureora through native bush alive with birdsong and stunning canopy of majestic trees. The second half of the 83km ride is connected by a series of impressive swing bridges to the old railway from the timber days of tree felling. Now only relics and foundations from the heydays of logging remain among the regenerating native forest, with boards describing the area at points along the trail.

16 of us (plus Paihikara) spent Anzac weekend riding the trail over two days. We arranged to meet the day before at Black Fern lodge - an eclectic, rustic old barn became the meeting point for us and offered a glimpse of the rugged area we were to ride through the next day.

Pureora has an interesting history. Anti-logging protests were led by conservation activists Stephen



Coalrange Cafe.....The only cafe for miles.....

King, Shirley Guildford, and others in the late 1970s. They had a novel way of erecting platforms on treetops, sitting over it to protest logging operations in the forests. The result of their efforts was tri-fold: the park was established in 1978; the Government changed rules to meet the protesters' demand to permanently stop logging operations; and the Native Forest Restoration Trust was formed which ensured that the park develops several areas into its present format. One of the pine forest areas that was restored with native species of trees, with great efforts of Guildford, was named in her memory in 1988 a year after her death as the "Shirley Guildford Grove".



Lower altitudes are characterized by tawa and tree ferns, as well as tall native trees, including kahikatea, matai, miro, rimu, and totara. The Pouakani Totara tree, New Zealand's tallest totara, is located east of the Field Centre. The giant totara, rimu, matai, miro and kahikatea trees tower 40–60 metres, and belong to an ancient family of trees dating from the dinosaur era. Higher altitudes include kamahi and Hall's totara; sub-alpine herbs are abundant near the peaks. Grasses within the park include toetoe.

There is rich native bird life in this forest including the rare kōkako and the kaka, kākārīki, kuku (kereru, a native pigeon), and North Island Robin. Piwakawaka (Fantail) and Tom Tits continuously accompanied us we rode along. The pure water in the park is also home to endangered whio (Blue Duck) which live in the fast moving water of the local rivers.

With the development of the Nga Haerenga Trails this area has been developed into a superb two day ride suitable for most energetic people.

We had two shuttles available to get us from Black Fern lodge to the start at Pureora Forest HQ.

Stop at the first shelter on the way up Mt Pureora





5 riders started a little bit before the main group of 13. A few km into the ride we came to the side track that goes to the small crawler tractor – a relic from the logging days that is now abandoned in the middle of the forest. Several club members debated something about spark plugs and engines before returning to the main track and continuing up the mountain. We climbed gently for the first 13 kms and had a stop at the first shelter for morning tea. The view from here

was across an area that had recently been logged and is now in the process of re-vegetation. The weather was dry and a bit overcast but the track was a quite muddy as a result of the previous couple of wet weeks. There were plenty of muddy puddles to negotiate! The forest was full of interesting plants and fungi. Keith spotted the most amazing bright blue toadstool thing (Blue Entoloma) that looked like a smurf should be under it!

The later group caught the early group at the high point for the ride and we continued together for the rest of the day. Lunch was at the end of one of the swing bridges that had been purposely built to get riders across some very deep gullies. These offer some of the few open areas on the trail to sit in the sun.



At the 35km mark we came to the Black Fern Lodge turnoff. This 4km track took us back to the lodge through an area of pine forest that is quite steep. The grassy track through the forest was also very slippery and tested even the most skilled riders. 7 hours after starting we were all back at the barn toasting our successful ride. For some of us it was a pretty tiring day and Clive and Keith decided to abandon riding the second day for various reasons.



We all enjoyed a toast at the end of seven hours out on the trail.....some the ACTA riders around the long table in the barn.

Other images from the day's riding experience.... high bridges and wet puddles!



Approaching the turn off, at the end of the day, for Black Fern Lodge.

Today was also a very successful trial of the "third Wheel" on Roel's bike.



The next day was overcast and low cloud blanketed the ridges that we were to climb to get back to trail. With a steady climb ahead some of us decided to pay an extra shuttle fee to be delivered to the top of the last climb in the pine forest from yesterday. 4 hardy riders rode from the lodge and waited at the main trail junction for the rest of the group. It was a pleasant rest for a short time with lots of bird activity in the forest.



The second day followed the old logging tramline. The entire trail has markers every kilometer along its length. From marker 39 to 42 is an easy ride through newly regenerating forest. From marker 42 you climb steadily through tawa and tanekaha forest, before levelling out towards the Maramataha Bridge. This is the longest and highest bridge on the trail at 141m long and 53m high. From the bridge, the longest climb of the day (around 30 minutes) will bring you to a cleared area known as “the terminus” just past the 47 mark; the most northern point on the tramline. The trail is almost entirely downhill from this point to the end in Ongarue.



You needed a good head for heights whilst riding over the bridges.

The view down to the streams below was fantastic!



Lunch stop on day 2.



Beautiful native bush regenerating along the streams offers cover for the multitude of bird species that we could constantly hear along the trail.



The spiral at the end of the trail. Quite a novelty to us all.



Pai rode in my back pack this time!



Families that chose to settle and work in this area were really challenged with the climate as well as the terrain. Evidence of the network of timber companies and logging operators that existed in the area have all but disappeared and interesting sign boards along this part depict and describe the hardships of life here. One hollowed out tree stump was home to a couple at one point.

Shortly before the end at Ongarue is the spiral. A feat of engineering at the time, this allowed the trains to drop a significant amount of altitude in a short distance. Today we see remnants of the old bridges as we complete the circuit and emerge from the darkness of the tunnel. An interesting set of pot holes caught a few of us as we entered the complete blackness in the tunnel!

With the last 30kms of the trail largely downhill it was a fast blat to the finish.

The trail is an easy gradient and suitable for all ages. You should use a mountain bike with knobby tires to feel most comfortable riding it. There is no cell phone coverage at all on it and so it is recommended to carry other appropriate safety equipment.

This is the second time I have ridden the trail and it is one that I could ride multiple times as it is truly an unspoilt piece of New Zealand.

People who rode with Pai were:

Di, Roel, Ron, Susan, Marion, David, Paul, Clive, Luitgard, Judy, Maurice, Chirsty, Claire , Keith and Ann.

